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Quarters

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Teacher

● Gwen Gration

"I had once a tall big pup—like this one," said Mr. Shaw.

"We have a cat, too. Would you like to see our pussy-cat?" shrieked young Charlie. "She's called Kitty Fisher, Mister Shaw. Dad says she's of the fur-line tribe."

"Oh, ay—'Lucy Locket lost her pocket, Kitty Fisher found it—'" The old man absently stroked the collie pup. "And what did I do now with my big pooch? Well, I put him in a sack and I drop a stone in with him. And I throw him in the pond."

"Mister Shaw!" Ma shuddered, and young Charlie and Wendy stared horror stricken, and even the dog sought cover under the couch.

"Mister Shaw, that wasn't right," Aunt Bird chimed in.

"Needn't be telling me, Ma'ams, that I did a mean thing, and needn't be thinking that I haven't paid in full." Mr. Shaw blew his nose. "But you see, Ma'ams, a dog that kills chickens can't be trusted, and no farmer can keep him. Already a neighbor said my dog had caught his duckling, and I stick up for him against my neighbor. Then that night and with my own eyes I see him snatch my hen, and I was so—so—frothy angry that I just put him in a gunnysack and pitch him in the pond."

Aunt Bird clucked loudly, like the hen the erring dog had caught. "It's only nature."

"I was punished," Mr. Shaw said decidedly. "It was in no other pond,

Ma'ams, they found my Sally—ten years later. And what could my girl be doing dead in that same pond, only nineteen she was, and carefully watched over like an uncommon flower and never had an unhappy day. And after her engagement, it was always parties, showers, joy. And that very night a Do, a big Do, and all in her honor, with caterers and a paid orchestra. So much happiness she had; her wedding dress all sewn and her marriage three weeks off." His face darkened. "Did something beckon her from way down the pond? I have often wondered."

"My dog beckons me, with his tail," said young Charlie.

"Hush, Charlie." Ma was watching the children with troubled eyes. "Mister Shaw, don't torment yourself. That dog had nothing to do with Sally's drowning, nothing. Perhaps someday, we'll know how it was. It's such a shock, and all so fresh now. But time, Mister Shaw, time will—" Ma paused and looked at Wendy. "Time won't heal, but maybe soften it. And now, you two children—"

"I was her helper; she always let me pass the chalk," young Charlie bellowed. "I was janitor. Teacher said, she said, 'Charlie, you wash blackboards blacker than anyone.'"

"Charlie, please—" Ma pleaded.

"Much obleeged, young nipper, much obleeged. She loved the children, always said she'd have eight of her own. She just *loved* the children

—but ‘To bed, to bed, mine curly head, and rise up in the morning,’” shouted Mister Shaw as he left, laughing, as if to make good his outbreak.

“But where is that there dog?” Wendy whispered excitedly to Charlie, and Aunt Bird reassured Ma the children didn’t understand.

“Poor old devil, he can’t comprehend,” said Dad. “Now it’s guilt. Last week something else. And even a dog has to get in on the blame. But better a dog, though. Poor Albert Armitage can’t hold his head up.”

“Ned—the children,” said Ma, as mothers do. “Now, kids, off to Blanket Market. Quick, quick. See which one of you can get there first.”

“I think Albert Armitage wants locking up.” The children had stopped on their way to Blanket Market and were listening in the stairwell to Aunt Bird. “His wife has left him. You knew that, didn’t you, Lily?”

“Oh, but Oriole,” said Ma, “that Shaw girl was tied to her mother’s apron strings.”

“Not tight enough,” Aunt Bird said grimly.

“Oh, Oriole, she—”

“Albert Armitage’s wife has gone to her mother’s with the children,” Aunt Bird cut Ma short. “And he was always seen with this Sally Shaw.”

“Not always,” said Ma. “He took his children to school and picked their teacher up if she happened along at the corner after she’d cut across the pond. Charlie idolized Sally Shaw. He doesn’t do well since she—And he calls Miss Penny ‘crab-apple.’ Miss Penny is the teacher now for first grade.”

“It’s some obsession he has about

Sally Shaw,” Dad said. “Things go deep with that kid.”

“He must lead poor old Miss Penny a dance,” clucked Aunt Bird. “He passes our Silvester’s class on his way to the principal’s office for punishment. She can’t handle him.”

“People expect too much of a big kid.” Dad’s voice sounded angry. “The shrimps get away with murder.”

“I shouldn’t have kept Charlie home that year,” Ma said worriedly.

“A bally shame, Lily.” Dad’s voice was still harsh.

“But, Ned, I was afraid of the highway, and I wanted our two to start school together. You know, Ned, neither of us thought he’d be so big for this age.”

“And in addition a year older than the others. Doesn’t matter that he’s unusually intelligent—he’s head and shoulders taller, and all the class hoot at him, ‘Charlie Longshanks.’”

“He was all right with Sally Shaw. She gave him duties and made him feel important. Her biggest pupil, her helper.” Ma sighed.

“You should have heard him purr,” said Dad.

“Teacher’s pet!” said Aunt Bird. “Fancy.”

“Sally Shaw knew every child’s need. It was quality in her.” Dad’s voice hadn’t gone soft yet.

“I was her helper,” bawled young Charlie from their lurking place in the stairwell. “We got pussywillows by the pond. Me and Teacher. After school. We got them for the little kids.”

“My word! If you two don’t go to bed,” called Ma.

Yet Aunt Bird’s voice still floated up to them. “Old couple . . . it goes to show . . . drowned in a pond she’d crossed over every day of her life

... so wrapped up in her ... lolly-dollied her ... you never can tell."

"I'm scared of that there dog." Wendy shivered.

"I ain't, 'cause how could a dog?" Charlie said, but wavered. Their world was full and full of mysteries—

The man in the moon.

By digging and digging, you come to China.

How only the birds and Mr. Shaw knew the exact day the sweet cherries were ripe.

If you put out your tongue or made a face at anyone, and the wind changed, you would be stuck with that face for life.

The rainbow—God's promise He would never again destroy the world by water.

By eating crusts and carrots, you could acquire beautiful curls.

When hens took a drink, they raised their heads and thanked God.

Teacher tied to her mother's apron strings.

Teacher—the day Ma registered them at school and ever since, they had loved Sally Shaw. Teacher—her curly hair, her soft voice, her sweet smell, her blue eyes, and the way she laughed with them instead of her mouth.

"Sometimes," Charlie glowed, "she wears a hard dress" (he didn't know about starch), "and sometimes she wears a soft dress." And yesterday in a game he had "tecked hold of her hand."

Even though Elaine and Emily Armitage were twins, they were lesser lights compared with Teacher, although one was dark and one was fair and they could sing duets.

And this was another mystery: dark people sang alto, and fair people sang soprano.

Then one day Ma told them Teacher had gone to live with Jesus and had added in the same choky breath, "Now, you two, try to be good friends to Elaine and Emily Armitage. Never let anyone say anything against them."

But that was only another mystery, like the mystery of God being able to see them any time—even when they were in bed and under the clothes.

"Elaine and Emily don't have birthdays like other people do," Charlie told Ma the next week.

"That's because they are twins," Ma answered. But Charlie scratched his head. No—it wasn't because they were twins.

Instead of a party and kissings, and their mother crying that she was losing her babies, their father left their birthday presents in the principal's office at school.

"Maybe he hid the presents there like Mama hides the jelly beans," said Wendy; but it wasn't that, because when the twins arrived home, their mother got blazing mad and went to the phone and asked the Salvation Army to pick up some children's toys.

Elaine cried over her doll. To have had it, and then to lose it. And the Salvation Army representative said, hoping to console the wailing child, "A little girl called Louisa, whom Santa forgot, will have *this*, and you can be happy thinking of her and her joy."

"Why did Santa be forgetting of her?" Wendy asked avidly.

"Maybe she spit." Charlie remembered the most heinous sin of all—but it was another of those mysteries.

That night when Charlie said his prayers, he added after the God-bless-all-the-orphans clause: "But don't

bless Weeda." An orphan named Louisa had got Elaine's doll—

"Miss Penny is always putting her finger to her lips and shaking her head at me when I sing, but Miss Penny can't sing," Charlie complained. "She sings funny. She sings high. 'Pip-pip-pip-pip—'" he mimicked in a falsetto.

Teacher had taught them to say *America*—like a prayer—and *My Country*, and then they must pause and think of their country. Charlie and Wendy always thought of peach and cherry blossoms, instead of woods and templed hills. They lived in a fruit belt—a land of color, a land of sky—with the girls and boys like gay and rare birds in their reds, yellows, and blues to make them visible on the highway. Every year, reporters came from the city with cameras to take pictures of the blossoms, and this year they had stripped off their coats and sat in Thorpe's ditch bemused. Ma had sent the children with water and ice cubes, thinking maybe the newsmen were faint, and the reporters had murmured something about the "never-never land."

But that was another mystery.

One Sunday of each year, city folk drove out in buses and cars, craning their necks and pointing to this and that orchard all along the marked route. The children, proud as punch, watched the traffic pass, and Ma invariably said, "Well, well, it should have been 'Blossom Wednesday' instead of 'Blossom Sunday,' although the sours are very lovely."

"It's a good land. My people came here as pioneers," Mr. Shaw would tell sightseers who stopped at his fruit farm. "My ancestors followed the trail of the black walnut. You could grow walking sticks even in this soil." The same joke did for

these city slickers year after year.

Throughout cultivation, the children helped Mr. Shaw by sitting on a trailer in back of his tractor. Mr. Shaw needed weight, he said, and thus the boys and girls supplied his need and earned a bumpy ride. The children knew the fruit was ripe when bangers fired off from early morning until twilight and scared off the flocks of birds, and all the farmers drove their trucks to Stop 20 on the highway and hired waiting men and women as pickers. Then once more the children played a part; when Mr. Shaw hauled the loaded baskets through the orchards, they again supplied the weight.

In blackflytime they would beg or steal lacy curtains from their mothers and jog along in back of Mr. Shaw like so many small ghosts. It was on one of these hazy May days that Elaine and Emily Armitage stood silently by Mr. Shaw's tractor, waiting to gain the rough ride. But there was no welcome for them in the old man's disconsolate face.

"But why?" Wendy asked Charlie, as the twins went off, their baby faces stricken. Charlie had a mind to bring them back, but the chugging tractor won over his intended act of kindness, and he put the curtain over his head against the flies.

"Don't they know we be going through the farm?" asked Wendy. Charlie shrugged his shrouded shoulders.

It was only another mystery. Such as the mystery of the bazaar when they had collected everybody's stuff, and Mrs. Donald (to get even, Ma said) had given them three dozen of Mr. Donald's books on his own life, written and published by himself (the girt fool, Mrs. Donald said), entitled, *The Life of James Gordon*

Donald—Atheist. Their lemonade had gone begging, and the neighbors had flocked to buy those dry old books without pictures.

In season when the orchards were forbidden, they played in the cemetery. "Land where my fathers died," Teacher had taught them.

"Greater love hath no man." The small fingers would go in and out of the engraved characters on the Soldiers' Monument.

There were gravestones showing gates. "The Gates of Heaven," Charlie said with authority, as they stood in awe.

There were two little concrete lambs: "In innocence they lived and in innocence they died." Wendy and Charlie remembered every word on those stones they loved the best.

And now this *new stone*—quaint—with the picture of Teacher glassed in. They kissed the sweet lips still smiling at them. "Sarah Shaw Dearly Loved."

And somehow or other they never connected *her* with the dead. *Teacher had gone to Heaven.*

Yet Charlie nattered Ma and Dad. "What if the world ends and every one dies but me?"

"Mixed-up kid," Dad said. "Only Sally Shaw seemed able to give him a sense of security."

"Hush, Ned," said Ma, as mothers do. "Charlie, fetch me a drink, and make the tap run a long time."

"My teacher she said, 'Charlie, when you get water, it has a chocolate malted flavor,'" Charlie said proudly, as he brought water slopping over the side of the tumbler.

"My word, Charlie," said Ma, as she mopped her dress.

"When I spilled water on Teacher, she said, 'Charlie, you have a generous nature,'" said Charlie.

"People like Sally Shaw never die, it seems," said Dad.

"Wendy, Charlie, you mustn't go to that pond alone, *ever*," Ma said one day, as the tall young pup came dancing up to her.

"The dog." Charlie wagged his head sagely.

"The children will get weird," Aunt Bird warned. "And, Lily, I would enjoy a walk over to the pond where that young teacher was murdered. And the man who drowned her—I could fair hamper him."

"But, Oriole. They don't even know if—"

"I know."

"But, Oriole—"

"I would have tried him. I would have proven him guilty. I would *that*. And so would his wife."

"Oriole, I declare! Come and look. And you, too, Charlie and Wendy. Hurry and see this herring we're going to have for tea. See Christ's thumb and forefinger. I've never seen His prints so distinctly," said Ma, as she held up the fish.

Yet by listening and acting daft and pretending they weren't listening, the children got the story. They got much from Aunt Bird; they got more from Aunt Bird's son, Silvester. And even some from Ma and Dad. These "little pitchers with the big ears" found it out, piece by piece and every piece. They added what they wanted. Took away what they didn't understand.

The evening that Teacher was drowned, Albert Armitage and she were seen together at the corner leading to the shortcut over the pond. He had never been able to explain. Never been able to clear himself. He had been questioned. Never tried. Yet never exonerated.

"I was with Teacher," said Wendy. "All day. Didn't I?"

"Me too," added Charlie. "Me too."

It was just another mystery. So many, many mysteries. Mrs. Green telling Ma she had left her teeth at the dentist's. "Now how could she have done that?" they wondered aloud, pulling at their own.

Their world was chock-full of mysteries.

There was something romantic and heartbreaking even to young children when Teacher's own sweetheart came to live with her parents and became a son to them. But to live so close and be able to see her grave any time—and the holly wreath when Christmas would come.

"He believes in her still," said the neighborhood, as Nicky Wade carefully clipped the grass on her grave.

"Poor soul, the mother has more trouble than she can bear," Ma was always saying, and Dad was always answering, "No, Lily, no. God puts His hand underneath the burden." And Aunt Bird would add pointedly, "I'd hamper the one who killed her." And then Dad would answer quietly but with deep anger, "No one had a perfect alibi, Oriole, and the men at the canning plant, the men who know Albert Armitage best, don't think he's capable of it."

And neither did Charlie or Wendy.

They had seen Albert Armitage again. He had come in Mr. Bean's candy store. Mr. Bean's face was growing redder with rage, as the kids scanned and re-scanned the trays of caramels, toffees, spice drops, sour balls, lollipops, and bubble gum. They were just asking Mr. Bean to change their dime into ten pennies when Mr. Armitage said, "Give them

all some of everything," and so ended their terrible problem of decision.

That night Charlie said to Ma, "I imagine God looks like Elaine's father—clean and sad."

"Charlie, dear, now listen. Miss Penny is Teacher now. You must try and love her like—But why *don't* you be kind to Miss Penny?" wheedled Ma, as the quarterly black-balling note came attached to the report card.

"Old Miss Penny, stick-stick-stenny."

He-legger, hi-legger, bowlegged!" Charlie hooted fiercely.

Ma's face was red with shame in front of Aunt Bird's disapproving glance. "But surely, Charlie, Miss Penny doesn't let you cheek her like that."

"Oh, she can't hear. I say it when I'm in bed," Charlie said craftily.

"He's always in the wrong. Now it's his dusty shoes," said Ma. "They have some sort of shoe drill. He never passes."

"Shame," clucked Aunt Bird, crossing her two fingers back and forth. "When I was a girl, my shoes were always bright, and I was a right good scholar, too."

"Teacher—I mean *my* teacher—she said, 'Charlie, I can see your shoes a long way off down the highway, shining like traffic lights,'" Charlie said proudly.

"He adored Sally Shaw. Just worshipped her. He used to work and work on his shoes. Kept them on the dresser in case the floor would soil them, and I couldn't keep a clean towel for his polishing." Ma's voice was floating after him as he ran to join Elaine and Emily Armitage. "I've got to thinking, Oriole, that Sally Shaw killed *herself*." Charlie stopped in his tracks.

"No, never. Fancy a girl like *that*

killing herself. And her marriage three weeks off," Aunt Bird said. He held his breath and waited for more. There was some buzzing and inconsequential chatter about Teacher's sweetheart, Nick Wade, and how the Shaws had always waited up when Sally was out at night; and how she was the child of their age and was tied to her mother's apron strings. Charlie scratched his head. Then he heard Aunt Bird's voice again. "Whatever do those Armitage children believe?" He shrugged.

All the children discussed freely what they believed. There were Gypsies, Santa Claus, the Devil, and the Weather Man to believe in. They wondered if any or all of them were true.

Charlie decided he believed in Santa Claus. They all felt they *must*, as he might get even by refusing to believe in *them*. All determined the Weather Man was something of a "stork." And the Devil they thought was in the same class; but when they got scared at night, they would all play safe and repeat: "At the name of Jesus, Satan's host doth flee." Gypsies, they all concluded, must be a made-up affair. And with the supercilious authority with which people dismiss superstitions, they dismissed the Weather Man and Gypsies as ignorant folklore.

"Miss Penny she said, 'Charles Graham, *please*, you throw everyone off tune,'" Charlie had sobbed to Ma the day the children sang at the Town's auditorium, and he and a few other grunting boys were left out. "But *my* Teacher said, 'Charlie, sing with your feet.' *My* Teacher said the little kids couldn't sing right if I didn't keep time with my feet."

It was Charlie's off-day. Simply because he was embittered about the

singing, when the three little girls came home, he took them to the pond to prove he wasn't afraid of the dog. Aunt Bird's boy, Silvester, was there too, catching frogs, and Charlie, still indignant at Miss Penny, threw rocks and spoiled Silvester's frogging. Things went from bad to worse, and it all ended by Silvester shouting that Elaine and Emily's father was a murderer.

"Gizzard!" Charlie, impotent with rage, yelled at Silvester.

"What's the matter with *you*?" the older boy asked coldly.

"Gizzard!" Charlie fired back, knowing no other word as adequate and stinging. "Gizzard! Gizzard!" He would have liked to bite Silvester, only his biting days were past.

"Gizzard, gizzard, gizzard!" Charlie hooted Silvester all the way from the pond and down the highway.

"My word—and what is it now? What are you saying?" asked Ma, as he burst in the door, weeping bitterly.

"Sticks and stones will break my bones

But names can never hurt me.

When you're dead and in your grave, You'll suffer what you've called me." Silvester was chanting righteously from the other side of the road.

"Gizzard!" shouted Charlie through his sobs.

It was an eventful day all around. Mrs. Armitage paid them her first call. She seemed flustered and excited. "I came to tell you I'm sending my girls to their aunt at the weekend—just for awhile." Ma got Mrs. Armitage out of one chair and into another, and Dad left his paper and fussed about the lights in the living room.

"Now, Charlie and Wendy, Elaine and Emily's mother would like to see

Kitty Fisher," said Ma. "Go find her. I think she's in the farthest orchard."

"You've been kind to my girls—" Mrs. Armitage hesitated. "And I want to ask a favor. Tomorrow I've a noon appointment I can't very well postpone, and my mother is away—and—would you give them lunch?" Mrs. Armitage was making a great effort to make the situation normal and usual, but before Ma had time to say she'd be very glad to have the girls to lunch, Mr. Shaw had opened the back door and was walking in as always. "Ma'am," he said, "I've brought you some of my celery, celery as breaks like an icicle, Ma'am." He was yelling as he hunted Ma through the kitchen, dining room, and into the living room, where they were sitting.

Mrs. Armitage was staring at the celery held in front of Mr. Shaw. She looked ashen and ill, and her shaky hands had gone to her head. "She's dizzy," Charlie whispered to Wendy. They both crouched in their lurking place behind the door.

Charlie left Wendy and was in the living room with a glass of water. It was filled full and slopping over. He handed it to Mrs. Armitage, "For you," he said.

"Charlie—why, Charlie—how could you know?" Mrs. Armitage murmured, paying no attention to her drenched condition.

"Teacher—I mean my *own* Teacher—let me get her water the day she was dizzy," he explained proudly. "That was the day she was drowned."

"Boy! What are you saying, boy?" Mr. Shaw's celery had fallen on Ma's new living-room rug.

"Teacher she said, 'Charlie, any water you get has a chocolate malted

flavor.' " He waited, flushed, well pleased with himself.

"Go on, lad, tell me all," Mr. Shaw said slowly. "Think carefully."

All the kids had sung at the Auditorium excepting him and two other grunTERS, and now it was *his* turn. He puffed with importance as he saw the interest in all the grown-up faces around him. He was smart and could tell a straighter tale than anyone. Dad was always sticking up for him. He pushed the day's humiliations behind and expanded.

"Teacher said to me, 'I feel dizzy today, and all the room is going round, and I can see hundreds and hundreds of Charlies.' " He stopped.

"My daughter was ill, and she never told us," said Mr. Shaw.

"Nah, she wasn't ill. She was dizzy," Charlie said dogmatically. "And Teacher said not to tell anyone, because she'd be all right for the party anyhow; and if her ma and pa knew, they'd put her to bed—like me when I had the measles. But I was the biggest and her helper, and I got her drinks all day." Charlie had done himself proud and now stopped for breath.

No one was talking now. Mrs. Armitage was sobbing, and Mrs. Shaw was blowing his nose loudly. "Much obleeged, young nipper. Much obleeged, Mister Charles," he finally said.

But Charlie hung his head. He was a Judas. Teacher had trusted him, and he had told on her. The dog who couldn't be trusted had been put in a sack and pitched in the pond. He burst into tears. But Ma and Dad, and even Aunt Bird, who had silently entered the house, were kissing him, instead of—He felt embarrassed. He, Charlie Longshanks, the biggest kid in class, slobbered over like this.

She had said he was so tall, he might grow up like Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln? He wailed again and loudly, as he thought of Teacher and then of his treason.

"Why?" It was Wendy's voice that bore the normal and familiar note.

"But why do they?" she started again. He felt comforted, and he looked at Wendy and shrugged. Wendy repeated, "But why are they all a-kissing of you?" And Charlie shrugged again.

It was just another mystery.

Poem

(after the Japanese)

• Joseph Beatty

1

After you left me
In the ravine beyond Chain Bridge
I found a broken bird
I took it home
And kept it through winter

2

What has become of you
Since that night we threw
The past over our shoulders
Like salt for good luck
Did you not, after all, forgive me?

3

Your eyes through tears
Were final and lost
I thought there was nowhere
You could go
And I not find you

4

I send you my love
By a spirit-dove
I would come myself
Except for the distance
And the tangle of the world

Who's the Father?

• Jesse Stuart

"It's a terrible thing to happen in our family," Mom said. "I remember the happy day for Tad and Fleeta when they married. I guess we can blame a lot of their troubles on their being separated by this war. Tad has seen a lot of strange women in his journeys over the world. But this doesn't give him the right to leave his wife. Such a pretty little woman, so good to work and save and care for the three little ones when he was away a-doin his part."

"But you left out adultery, Subrina," Pa said. "A man's wife out adulterin when he is fighting for his country is bad. Our grandson, Tad, is hard to fool. He says the fourth child, Teenie, was begotten and born when he was on one of the oceans, is not his child. Adultery is not only man's law for a divorce but it's God's law, Subrina. You women uphold for one another," Pa continued, while perspiration broke out over his red face. "You speak in favor of his wife, against our own flesh and blood. Don't you remember when our oldest daughter, Sistine, used to bring their three little girls and their only son, little Tad, tagging behind them over the Seaton ridge to see us? I can see them coming across the pasture field now. Sistine kept Tad at her side after he tried to play with the sheep, and the ram butted him. He's our flesh and blood, Subrina, and we can't decide against him."

"I'll decide against him if he's

wrong," Mom said. "Who knows what he's been doin' in the Navy? He might have practiced a little infidelity himself. Seein' so many good lookin' women in other parts of the world. Maybe they were looking for men. Tad might have imbibed like his Grandpa does on occasions. It's hard to tell, Martin, what Tad has done!"

"You're all for the women because you are a woman," Pa told my mother.

"Sure I'm for the women," she said. "We birth them, the men," she said. "And we love them. But a woman's lot among these hills has been a hard one. I think about poor little Fleeta's tryin' to keep the home fires burning while Tad was away. She lived in that little house on the allowance he sends home. Tad didn't have to reinlist in the Navy after the war. Tad doesn't like our hills in Appalachia, where he was birthed and raised to manhood. Tad has roving blue eyes for oceans, the world, and the bottle. And you know it. Tad won't work, Martin. He got back in the Navy because life is easier. If Fleeta has committed adultery, I can't much blame her. Doesn't the Good Book say there is a time for Love. Doesn't it say there is a time for everything? Leave a wife here for months, her husband gone, and her bearin' the cost of love! The woman is the one who pays for love. Our grandson, Tad, is an eyeful for a woman. So we don't know what he's been doin'."

"And that little plump Fleeta is an eyeful to a man," Pa said. "I am a man and I know. I don't care if she has had four youngins before she's twenty-four. When she walks before a man who is a man, he'll look at her twice!"

"Go on and argue for Tad because he's your grandson, Martin," Mom said. "That's your nature because you're a man. But our daughter, Sistine, has some proof up her sleeve. She doesn't want this to go to court. She thinks it can be settled out of court. You know there's not been a divorce amongst our youngins and our four married grandchildren. This is the only problem like this we have had to face. So, let's quit quarreling and go face the problem."

When anything happened in our family, we always held our own court. This was the decision of our family first. Now, since Grandpa and Grandma Hinton were no longer with us, Pa and Mom were the oldest in our family. They had to make decisions for us. If any of us were a-mind to do it, we could go beyond them and take our troubles to the county court. But we usually didn't do it. We saved the county courts time and money by ironing out our own problems at home. When my nephew Tad accused his wife, Fleeta, of adultery, this was a serious problem we had to face. We had had one before when my niece Esther had a child out of wedlock by Amos Pratt. We had met to decide what to do. Amos Pratt wanted to marry her and give the child his name. But since Esther was a branch of our tree, she didn't want to marry him after he had lied to her and after he had disgraced her. She wanted no part of spending the rest of her life with him. So we met to help her decide whether she

should marry him or not. Well, the decision was in Esther's favor. Sister Mallie, Esther's mother, took the child and gave her her husband's name. This little girl became Letitia Treadway. And Esther later met a nice young man, Oliver Ball, and married him. She explained her mistake so that there would be no misunderstanding. And they never asked. And no one ever asked for any support for this little girl from the real father. We had Amos Pratt with us the day we made this decision. We ended up by telling him we wanted no part of him, that Esther was right: he had fooled her once but he wouldn't fool her a lifetime.

I wasn't married at this time. I had no wife. So I stayed home with my parents. My marriage came last of the four children in our family. I stayed with my parents and helped them in the fields and in the family courts we held to solve our problems. I had to restrain sister Mallie and brother-in-law Cief Treadway that day we held family court over Esther's problem. Brother-in-law Cief would have cleaned Amos Pratt in a fistfight. Mallie was ready to pounce him too over his gettin' their daughter Esther with child with a promise to marry her. Then his puttin' it off until people knew Esther was in the family way when she was unwed. Well, this hurt our family but only for a while. We worked it out ourselves.

Now Tad's and Fleeta's problem was another nasty one to come before our family court. Tad was Pa's favorite of six grandsons. And as Mom had often said, he was an eyeful for the girls. He was six feet tall, fair of face with icy blue eyes and with platinum-blond hair. He had a nice smile, a friendly manner, was a gay

companion with those who passed the bottle, and work was his enemy. He loved a ship and the high seas. He loved the company of rowdy men because he was rowdy himself and unsettled. As I'd heard Tad say many times, the only life for a man was a ship and all the ports of the world if he could make them. But once when he was home on leave, he married pretty Fleeta, an eyeful for a man if there ever was one. She was Tad's childhood sweetheart. When his enlistment was up after six more months, he came home from the Navy and tried to settle down in our Valley with Fleeta. But scratching on the steep hills in Appalachia in our Valley, trying to grow what they ate, mining some coal when he could find the need, of a miner, for extra cash to supplement his livelihood, he said farming was not for him. He said he could do better in the Navy. So he reenlisted. And he came home on leave and begot his children. And as Fleeta and my mother said, he wasn't so anxious to get a leave and come home when one was born. And this is why my mother often told my father and Sistine, my oldest sister and Tad's mother, how her heart ached for Fleeta.

We walked back over the same path toward the little shack where Fleeta and Tad lived. The shack was very close to where sister Sistine and Brother-in-law Del Bratton lived. This was the path Tad had walked with his mother and three sisters when he used to come to our old home and visit his grandparents. There were no sheep in the pasture now. But we had cattle here. We didn't go to Tad's and Fleeta's home. We went to Del's and Sistine's home, a sprawling plankhouse upon the side of a hill. All of the family couldn't

have got inside Tad's and Fleeta's shack. And besides, Tad had come home on leave and had stayed with his mother and father instead of going to his own home.

As we crossed the field, Pa and I smoked our cigars. A swirl of smoke, carried by a brisk wind, trailed behind us over the April green pasture. Pa led our single-file walk and I followed. We were very silent. When we reached the Left Fork of the Valley, we could see several members of our family out in the yard walking around. Among them was young Tad, in his white sailor suit with his black tie fluttering in the wind. We didn't see Fleeta out in the yard. We crossed the Left Fork by stepping over a little stream. The day was warm enough for the butterflies to be drinking water from a small wet sandbar. And when we stepped across the stream, the butterflies flew up. They were carried away on the wind. Pa grunted as he climbed the steep bank up to the house. But my mother didn't grunt. She was a tall woman who took long strides when she walked up hill or down. Mom was tall and slender, with strong blue eyes, a sun-tanned face from working in the garden and in the corn and tobacco patches with Pa and me.

When we walked up to the yard, Brother-in-law Del was first to speak.

"They're all here and waiting," he said. There was a sadness written on his face and in the tone of his voice. "I'm glad you've come."

Mom walked through the door to the front, where Sistine and Fleeta were. We spoke to Brother-in-law Cief and sister Mallie and Brother Justin and good wife, Sister-in-law Effie. We shook hands with them as if it had been months since we had seen each other. We all lived in this

valley, which wasn't five miles long. Young Tad stood before us grinning. I'd not seen him for months. I spoke to him and shook his hand.

"Let's go inside everybody," Pa said. "Let's get down to business and get this trouble settled."

Pa, being our elder, we took him at his word. We followed him inside the house. And when we got inside, there were not chairs enough for all. So Brother-in-law Cief and I stood up. There sat pretty little Fleeta with a downcast look. And no wonder. She was on family trial for adultery. She had her and Tad's little ones around her, a girl, two boys, and a baby girl on her lap. At least she was caring for her little children, and not Sailor Tad.

"Well, this trial must begin as we have had others," Pa said. "We don't want this one to go to court. You know why we are here. It's not like a dinner for all that we have when we are happy and laugh and talk and visit with one another. This is a serious occasion. I know young people choose their mates and agree before the eyes of God and man to go through life together. Then, when they separate, it is a terrible thing. But there are certain things that justify their parting."

"I have something I would like to say, Martin," Mom said. "I don't believe in divorce. Here is my nephew, Tad Bratton, separated from his wife, Fleeta, and he has accused her of adultery. That little baby girl on Fleeta's lap, Tad says doesn't belong to him. Isn't that right, Tad?"

"That's right," Tad said, with eyes downcast looking at the floor.

"But this baby is yours," Fleeta says. "If there is honor in a mother, I know the baby belongs to you. How can I conceive without a father?"

"That's just it," Tad said quickly. "You have conceived without me."

"All right, let's stop the quarreling," Sister Sistine said. "You are my son, Tad, and Fleeta is my daughter since you have married her. She is part of this family. She belongs to the family since you have chosen her for your bride and to bear your children. If we produce proof that this is your child, will you accept Fleeta as you did in the vows you took on your wedding day before the eyes of God and man and all your family?"

"Yes, if you can prove to me that baby is my daughter," he said. "Say I might be a sailor and be rough and sail the seas and visit ports and meet strange people over the world and not deny I like the bottle. But this thing has shaken me from the top of my head to the end of my toes."

"When were you home last, Tad?" Pa asked him.

"About seven and a half months ago," he said. "And that big baby is no seven-months baby like Fleeta says she is. She can't fool me."

"I'm not trying to fool you, Tad," she said looking up with tear-filled eyes, "I'm telling you the truth. I've told you the truth. You won't listen."

"All right, I want all of you who are branches from the Houndshell tree to sit down in a circle on the floor," Mom said. "This includes you of course, Martin?"

"What do you mean, Subrina?" Pa questioned her.

"I mean for you to do as I say this time," she said.

Then Pa sat down on the floor.

"All right, Fonse, sit down by your father," Mom said to me. "Your father ought to know all his youngins belongs to him."

I didn't know what Ma was up to. But I obeyed her as I had always done.

"All right, Justine, sit down by Fonce," she said. "And, Sistine, you and Mallie sit down too."

After our sisters had sat down to form a half circle on the floor, Mom said: "Tad, you sit down there with them."

"Now I could ask others to sit down there too, but there will not be any need for it. There are enough on the floor. You will be witnesses and proof. Now, I want you to take off your shoes, socks, and stockings."

We did as my mother had told us.

"Look at your toes, Martin," Mom said. "You have two grown together on one foot. On the other foot you have two pairs grown together."

"Yes, and I've got a pair grown together," Sistine said.

"One pair on one foot," I said. "And two grown together part way on the other foot."

"What about you, Justine?"

"A pair on each foot."

"All right, Tad," Ma said. "What about you?"

"My toes are just like Grandpa Houndshell's," he said. "Look at his and look at mine. I didn't know we were so alike."

"All right, Fleeta, show the toes of the little girl on your lap," Mom said.

When Fleeta pulled the long dress up to show the baby's little doll feet, there was a silence among the big people standing and sitting in this room until one could have heard a pin dropped from navel-high to the plain boards in this floor. There was this baby, a little blossom off the Houndshell tree if there ever was a true one. Just like her Great Grandfather Martin Houndshell. And every

body's eyes in the room turned to her red little feet. She was asleep now on Fleeta's lap.

"Then, you say she's not your daughter, Tad?" Mom asked him. "How can you say it?"

"I thought—" Tad stammered. His face was red. Tears welled in his eyes. He couldn't finish his sentence. No one interrupted him. Everybody wanted to hear him speak. They wanted to hear what he would have to say for himself. He didn't have anything to say. If he had had anything to say, he couldn't say it.

"Pull off your shoes, Fleeta," Sister Sistine said.

She was wearing her slippers and no stockings. Sitting with the baby on her lap, she couldn't bend over, but she gladly kicked her slippers off and began to move her toes. Not any of her toes were grown together.

"This has to come from you, Tad," Sister Sistine said. "She is your daughter."

"Yes, the web-toes is a trait in the Houndshell family," Mom said. "I don't have any toes grown together. So, Martin has never had any right to doubt who his children belonged to, but if he ever had, I've had the proof in my mind a long time. And when I heard, Tad, you were accusing Fleeta of adultery, I came over here and looked at the baby's toes. I knew you'd lose this trial. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Yes, Grandma," he sighed.

"Then kiss Fleeta," she said. "Apologize to her. Help her carry the children back to the shack. Love her and love your children and apologize to your little daughter when she grows up."

"Grandma, don't you or anyone else in this family ever tell her when she grows up what I've done," Tad

says, "I'm so sorry for all this. But I'm happy to be convinced she belongs to me."

"This ends the trial and thank you, Mom," Sister Sistine said. "Thank God, too, there will be no divorce."

"This has convinced me," Brother-in-law Del said.

"A most convincing trial," Brother-in-law Cief said. "When we go home, we'll check our children's toes."

"You were right this time, Subrina," Pa said. "Why didn't you tell me you had the proof before we started over here?"

"I wanted to convince this whole family so there would be no doubts about Fleeta and no talking afterwards."

"Just like me," Pa said. "She'll be like Tad has been, only more so, a favorite great granddaughter of mine."

Second Class Beatitudes

• Thomas Kretz

Blessed are the poverty program praisers
who water their lawns throughout the drought.

Blessed are the mournful tears of those
who convinced grandpas they were worse than useless.

Blessed are the silently long-suffering
who are as inert as the steel ball destroying.

Blessed are TV's indignant viewers
who remain sprawled on living room sofas.

Blessed are close forgiving friends
whose minds are diaries of detail.

Blessed are obviously modest eyes
who see it all without turning sweet heads.

Blessed are the diligent pickets
who parade one side of the banner for two.

Blessed are the front-and-backbitten
who hope to inherit the kingdom of revenge.

A Matter of Survival

• Paul Friedman

Meek, indecisive, timid. That's what they said about Goodie Brown. He's harmless, he wouldn't hurt a fly, they said.

In his head Goodie Brown led an active life. His inner eye saw him do things that other eyes would never see him do.

Physically he wasn't imposing: short and dumpy, with a fringe of gray hair and melancholy eyes. Usually his pants were pulled around on his waist so that his fly was off center.

People were always stopping him from doing what he wanted to do, Goodie felt. They interfered. He kept a list of the people who had wronged him; and, like the other things that were important to him, it existed in his head.

The snow kept Goodie Brown home: a dingy two-room basement apartment with one street-level window. He made tea. On the sidewalk near the window was a battered garbage can. The kettle sang. Goodie didn't notice. It all seemed so futile. Tired. Forty-three years old and he's had it. Again.

Goodie didn't see the blind man outside his window who was bending over to tie a shoe.

It wasn't hard for Goodie: He walked to the chest. Opened the drawer. Touched it. Took it. Raised it.

Goodie took the safety off.

"Hey," the blind man yelled, then

came rushing down the stairs. Goodie Brown didn't hear. The blind man pounded on the door and yelled, "Open up, open up." Finally the sound penetrated, and with a start Goodie realized someone was at the door. He stood where he was, called back from another world, blinking, groggy, unable to move, moving finally, putting the gun away, closing the drawer, opening the door.

The blind man spoke furiously, not trying to make sense, only sound: keep talking. Goodie didn't hear what the blind man said.

Goodie only heard the voices in his head: You're kidding—No! the first shot didn't kill him, had to pull the trigger twice—Twice, Jesus, that takes—Goodie listened to the shocked, familiar voices, and he detected a note of respect.

The blind man, wearing dark glasses, was dressed very lightly, only a thin leather jacket, no hat, no gloves.

". . . and don't let financial worries interfere with your vacation plans, just call Household Lending," a transistor radio said, as a teenage girl walked past the apartment.

Young, the blind man had curly black hair and a clear complexion. Wind blew into the apartment. The blind man's shoulders took up the doorway; when he gathered his breath for a new burst of words, the depth of his chest was emphasized. He had a swimmer's slimness and fullness.

Like a man in a trance, Goodie looked at the magnificent physical specimen, who was standing in the bitter cold, speaking.

The kettle whistled.

The blind man held a black box which had printed on it: Sight Center. Talking rapidly, watching Goodie intently to make sure he made no sudden movement, the blind man opened the black box, and it was full of soap. Words: falling on top of each other, a torrent of them:

Scented — savory — sweet — three bars — two dollars — hand made — high quality — blind craftsmen — Sight Center — charity — business — sweet smell —

Goodie was freezing.

The blind man watched him like a hawk.

Two dollars. The kettle hissed. Two dollars. Snow was blowing in. Heat was escaping, the door was open. Go away.

How could he send this blind man away without a sale?

He wasn't going to buy the soap; he couldn't send the man away; faced with those certainties:

The gun. Raising the gun. Getting the gun, raising the gun. Raised. Pull—

"Well, how about one for a buck, if you don't want three for two? A buck, a buck, c'mon, one lousy dollar," the magnificent physical specimen said.

The wind stung. Goodie started to turn to see if snow was accumulating in his apartment, and the soap salesman, spotting that sudden movement, the first sign of a door-in-the-face, reached out: "Wait!"

They were having tea.

Pipes crisscrossed overhead: water pipes, steam pipes; exposed electrical

wires dangled from the light fixture directly over the cramped kitchen table at which they sat.

"You don't have a dog," Goodie said.

"It's the dogcrap," the blind man answered. "I can't stand it."

"A cane? Can't you hurt yourself without a cane?"

"When I'm older, I'll get a cane, when I'm a hundred."

Silence. The blind man seemed content. He sipped his tea and, finally done with it, spoke: "Yessir."

Goodie looked up; the blind man smiled. His white, even teeth stood strong and straight in his youthful face. "Yessir," the blind man said again, "if you make up your mind, you can lick any problem." He paused for emphasis, leaned forward. "If you make up your mind to have faith, that is. Drive and willpower count, but they'll only get you so far. Faith, it takes you all the way."

Goodie looked over at the black box, which the blind man had left near the door; it was wet and dirty, and the floor around it was turning muddy brown.

"I'm not blind," the blind man said.

"More dirt," Goodie sighed.

The blind man toyed with his sunglasses. "I'm not interested in conning you," he said, "That's why it's okay that you know I'm not blind."

"Much obliged."

"I had faith I'd save you."

"Suppose I didn't want to be saved?"

A cat stood on the grillwork outside the street-level window. It had cold, hungry eyes.

"This is my hustle," the blind man said, turning and pointing to the black box. "It's how I make a living:

conning people. Getting them to buy my perfumed soapsuds. I used to be blind; that's how I got this idea. Then, one day I got better; it was a miracle."

"A miracle?"

"An operation, okay, that make you feel better? You're some kind of a cynic, aren't you? To me it was a miracle; how would you feel? One week I can't see, the next week I can. That's good enough for me to call a miracle."

"What's your name?" Goodie Brown asked.

"My life's full of miracles, like just seeing you getting ready to kill yourself."

"You shouldn't have interfered."

"Kurtz. How come you want to know?"

"I'm not going to buy your soap, Curtis."

"Why?"

"You're not blind."

"Can't afford it? A guy who was going to kill himself a minute ago, and now you're worrying about a buck?"

"You didn't do what you did just to make a sale, did you?"

"I got faith."

"That you'll make the sale?" Goodie asked.

"That when I leave, you won't kill yourself."

"You shouldn't have interfered, Curtis."

"I'll make the sale, too. Why shouldn't I? I'm not harming anyone, I'm helping. I'm being honest. You don't lose a sale for saving a life."

"I don't want soap."

"Think positively."

"You're on my list, Curtis."

"What list?"

"My Christmas list."

The cat was emaciated. Its teeth touched the iron grillwork, and when its mouth opened, snowflakes landed on its tongue. The cat stared inside hungrily.

"I better get going," the blind man said.

"What about the sale?"

"I guess it'll happen now."

There was a loud noise—an eruption—and the drain in the sink backed up. Dirty water bubbled into the sink, then, a moment later, there was a sucking sound, the drain swallowed the water, and the dirt was left behind.

"That's your faith," Goodie said.

"You make your faith do all the work. You just walk out, and if it happens it happens—but nothing just happens. You're putting all the responsibility on me. I shouldn't have to carry the burden of your faith." Goodie said that as he took the money out of his wallet.

The blind man was going to his soapbox, but he wasn't answering Goodie; he'd already had his say.

"All your stories have happy endings—" Goodie said. "A miracle gets you your sight back, you make your sales, you just save me in the nick of time. Everything works out for you."

The blind man handed over three bars of soap. "You won't harm yourself, will you?" He put his hand on the doorknob. "Remember, there's nothing so bad that you can't beat it."

Goodie rushed at the blind man, to grab him, to shake him, but stopped short, stunned: Through the open doorway he saw a spastic walking on the sidewalk.

The spastic, a man about thirty, was being aided by an old woman;

she looked like his mother. He had little control over his arms and legs, and less over his neck; yet over his lip was a pencil line moustache. Goodie stared at that moustache.

The wind gusted and snow continued to fall.

"Who gave you the right to interfere?" Goodie yelled.

The cat, shivering, starving, turned to the garbage can, sprang up, hovered a moment on the rim, then jumped down and in.

Realizing suddenly that he was alone in the apartment, Goodie turned from the door, ran for his gun, got it, then ran to the window, and threw it open.

"See what I'm doing, look what I'm going to do," he screamed, sticking his head out the window.

The blind man was on the sidewalk.

Goodie took the gun and with his hand shaking raised it to his temple.

The old woman turned toward the shouting.

"You see, you see," Goodie screamed. "Don't you know that a man will do anything to live?"

Through his mind flashed a picture of the spastic son, submitting on a chair: lathered up, head bobbing, heart pounding as the razor in his mother's hand came closer, closer—Goodie pulled the trigger, once, twice, three times.

The old woman quickly pulled her son toward the corner.

This time there were no shocked, respectful voices in Goodie's head.

"Why did you have to butt in, why couldn't you leave me alone?" Goodie sobbed. He dropped the empty gun to the floor, the gun for which he had no—the gun for which he'd never had any—bullets.

The blind man stood at the open window. In a sudden frenzy, Goodie, who'd never before lifted a hand to anyone, lunged toward the blind man, leaped up, and struck him in the face. It caught him a glancing blow, knocking the dark glasses off his face.

There was dead white flesh where his eyes should have been.

The cat left the garbage can, pawed at the black box, which lay on the sidewalk collecting snow, then crossed the gutter.

Turncoat

• Gordon Gilsdorf

Death

would shed
the villain's
role,
redeem
all we
hate him
for,

should he
in greedy
kindness
take
the two
of us
together.

The Magician, On the Revelations of His Secrets

Two Poems

• Dianne K. Sisko

Yes, I am the magician—
my powers are my own.
Do not be fooled
by dark tales of my friends;
I assure you, my companions
are widely respected
in many lands.
Yes; I, too, am widely respected.
I have been renowned
for many years.

Recently, as I assumed
the sweeping dusk-blue cloak
with silver moons and crescents
and white stars, I changed
the aspect of my visage
as I changed my cloth.

They did not always see
me as I am
at present.
(This said in
strictest confidence).

The Sword Swallower

I am the sword swallower
Dancing in slippery circles, and
trying so hard to please; I smile
Yes? and nod and eagerly smile
And nod, and look around
And lead them all in laughter.
I crave the taste of metal;
I like the way the cold metal blade
Slides down the back of my throat.
It's almost like not
Performing at all: I enjoy it too much.
Applause doesn't mean
A thing to me, but I suppose
I'd miss its absence.
I am the sword swallower;
The cool blade seems to soothe
My tongue of fire:
The relief, if not pleasant,
Is, at least, real.

An Afternoon on Heron Creek

• Donald C. Stewart

Summer was cresting in the mountains of northwestern Wyoming. For three weeks a hot July sun had been relentlessly sucking moisture out of the great forests of lodgepole pine which dominated the area. The heat and subsequent dryness had penetrated even to the cool forest floor turning the flexible pine twigs and needles brittle. Infrequent open meadows in this vast timberland, their grasses browned by the drought, were empty at midday, the elk, deer, and buffalo having sought respite along shaded water courses.

On this particular day, at noon, Warren Edwards was hiking the trail to Heron Creek—alone. But he was only peripherally aware of the heat, the crackling duff beneath his feet, and the immense silence of the woods. He was totally absorbed in last night's dialogue with Jake Withers, the self-appointed philosopher of Cold Creek Camp. Like an endless tape recording, that conversation played over and over in his mind. Jake had taunted him:

"Warren, there ain't any fish that big in Heron Creek. You must a been a little sun-stroked. A log underwater can look like a king salmon to a poor devil who never even caught a three-pounder. This fish you're talkin' about is a figment of your imagination."

"I *saw* the fish. And it was big. *Very* big. Logs don't swim across pools."

"Well, even supposin', which I

don't for a minute, you did see a big fish, what do you want him for? Can't you buy meat at the store? Why do you want to take life?"

Warren bristled. "I don't *want* to kill anything. It's the challenge in this sport—my light tackle against that monster."

"*Some* challenge. All you lose is a fly and some leader. The fish can lose its life! Even if it's instinctive life, it's still life. You know, Warren, you're that old cave man with a stone ax, only you've refined it into a fly rod to justify killing God's creatures. You give them a chance! That's sportsmen's rot! You really want to kill—that's the pleasure."

Warren raged inwardly. He knew that as a hunter, a stalker of fish or game, he satisfied a need as basic as that for air. And he knew Jake refused to understand this. If only he *could* explain to Jake *and* himself why he felt so keenly the pressure of this age-old drive! But he could not. So he resolved, for the moment, to attack the problem for which a solution was possible. He would bring in his phantom fish—what Jake called "the ghost of Heron Creek"—and damn his tormentor triumphantly. Perhaps, in the process, he would settle that other problem. He hoped so.

In a few moments he came out of the timber into the meadow at the west end of Heron Valley. Towering up along its north side like a giant palisade were the dusky rhyolite cliffs of the Jackson Range. Scrubby

lodgepole pines fought to root beneath these cliffs, dotting the steep slopes on which they grew like routed troops. Many had been destroyed by expanding talus slopes. They lay, brown and lifeless, atop the fan-shaped fields of splintered rock. The cliffs were nearly free of debris. Shaken loose in the great Hebgen Earthquake a year ago, this debris spilled out over the talus like streaks of peroxidized hair.

Across Heron Valley from the Jackson Range were the Red Mountains. Slowly melting snow, trapped at higher elevations in these rounded green hills, fed the innumerable freshets and brooks which tumbled down them to form the headwaters of Heron Creek. Warren crossed the meadow to the creek and paused momentarily, held by the clarity and tranquillity of the stream. He was tall, rangy, sandy-haired, and fair complexioned. Predictably, the wind and mountain sun had burned his forehead, nose, and high cheekbones a soft glowing red. His full lips, pursed as he studied the creek, were cracked and dried. But on his hazel eyes, which peered so intently into the water, there appeared no awareness of these physical discomforts. Purposefully, he wore green khaki pants, partially covered by green hip boots, and a brown khaki hat. In place of a brim, the hat had a multi-colored circle of number 12 and 14 dry flies. Three Little Jack Horners, a Royal Coachman, a Sofa Pillow, two Grasshoppers, four Mosquitoes, and a Black Gnat mingled indiscriminately in this circle with a host of decorative and non-functional flies. The latter were Warren's concession to the passion for color and design which, in long winter evenings, he allowed to distract him from the

more serious business of making flies that would take fish. He carried a seven and one-half foot bamboo rod, creel, and net. Over his gray cotton workshirt he wore his fisherman's vest. In the nooks and crannies of the vest were line dressing, a knife, a whistle, leader material, a small metal box containing extra flies, a nail clipper, a hand scale for weighing and measuring fish, and insect repellent. The pockets containing line dressing and leader material were worn and grease-stained.

Warren finished his survey of the stream and checked his watch—one o'clock. Then he began to follow a fisherman's trail along the north side of Heron Creek. It was a foot-wide path through tenacious, coarse, and constantly encroaching grass. Along it Warren saw the discarded lures, lost flies, broken leaders, and beer cans of the occasional fisherman on Heron Creek. But the path and litter were the only human intrusions upon the narrow meadow through which Heron Creek flowed. Composed primarily of heavy brown grass, this meadow was dotted with fallen lodgepole pines, sage, stands of timothy, cinquefoil, occasional shooting star, and wild onion, the latter particularly thick along the banks of the stream. Warren stopped for a moment to pluck one of the flowers in the head of an onion plant. He stripped back the purple-and-white-streaked petals exposing the hard green ovary protected by them. He crushed it, savoring the rich garlic odor arising from the juice which moistened his thumb and index finger. Then he moved on.

One mile and a half upstream he halted in the shade of a stunted, wind-blown lodgepole pine. The tree stood by the creek where it tumbled off a long slick into a series of rap-

ids. From one pocket of his vest he took a packet of nine-foot nylon leaders. He had built each of them in four sections, the thick end measuring fifteen thousandths of an inch, the tippet but four. He selected one, tugged fiercely at each barrelknotted joint to reassure himself of its firmness, and attached it to the end of his line. Hooked to the other end of it were several yards of backing. No fish Warren had ever hit had run out the line to the backing because he had never caught a truly big fish. But he knew where this one lay—at the bottom of the dark pool in the creek, seventy-five yards ahead of him. It was the phantom he was determined to turn into solid flesh before Jake Withers' astonished eyes.

To discover whether or not it was feeding, he took a pair of miniature binoculars from his right trousers' pocket and focused them upon the pool. It was absolutely still except for occasional surface rippling by the light gusts of wind skimming across the valley. He watched intermittently for fifteen minutes and saw that the fish was not feeding.

Setting aside his rod, creel, net, and hat, Warren walked softly through the prickly sedge grass near the bank of Heron Creek. Then he crossed the slick travertine terrace of Opal Spring. On the other side of the terrace, Warren dropped to his knees and crawled awkwardly but silently toward the pool.

In the grass around him were the fat grasshoppers of a lush July. He captured six and put them into his upper left vest pocket. He was now five yards downstream from the pool, inching toward it. Just below the point where the creek bottom dropped off into the dark pool, Warren took a grasshopper from his pocket

and flicked it out onto the stream. It dropped into the water below the pool and was carried swiftly down stream. He took a second one and flicked it high and far—above the pool. A tiny series of ripples, like those from a rock dropped into a still pool, emanated from the struggling insect. Then, silently and effortlessly, the great fish came up out of the depths. It sucked the grasshopper in and disappeared. Warren was rigid; a sickness settled in his bowels. He flicked another grasshopper high and far, and another, and another. Each time the fish rose, and each time Warren experienced the same sickness of fear and joyful anticipation. He threw the last grasshopper out, but the fish did not see it immediately. It darted out from under the bank and drifted downstream moving rapidly back and forth as it tried to locate the bug. Warren flattened himself in the grass.

A moment later he looked up warily. The fish had disappeared; the dark pool was calm. Warren crawled back from his vantage point to the run-off channel of Opal Spring, crossed that gingerly, and returned to his equipment. He picked up the net and creel and took a number twelve Jack Horner from his hatband. He slipped the end of his leader tippet through the eye of the hook, wound it around four times, fed it back through the first loop, and tugged on the tippet. The knot slid into shape. It was secure. The great trout would have to break the tippet if hooked. It could do that easily—the tippet tested at three pounds, probably a third of the fish's weight. The contest would be unequal—the odds were with the fish.

Warren had already picked out his casting position, a point directly be-

low Opal Terrace. He hoped to draw the fish into a run downstream so that he could drop into the creek and engage it in the shallow uncluttered slick above the rapids. But first it had to be hooked. As Warren moved softly through the sedge to his casting position, the wind continued to gust lightly sending little shivers over the surface of Heron Creek. Slightly over thirty feet from the dark pool, he stopped. He determined to pitch the fly about two feet above the pool and some four inches from the bank. From his casting angle, all of the rod and most of the line would move over land. Only the leader and the end of the line would hit water, permitting the fly, at most, two and one-half feet of free float. After that it would drag and form its wake. If the fish did not strike before that happened, it would not strike at all.

Warren shook the rod loosely in his hand, then seized it purposefully, his thumb planted firmly on its top. He began to cast, letting out line. His right arm went up and down like a hammer, the wrist barely moving. Soon, thirty-five feet of line and leader bristled in the air over the land. Warren lifted the rod and his backcast snaked out high behind him, the leader shooting lashes of pink and yellow. He turned slightly toward Heron Creek and brought the rod forward to a ten o'clock position. The line coiled behind him, spiraled past, and snapped out straight six inches above the water, dropping the fly as softly as a snowflake two feet above the dark pool. The fly floated freely in the smooth water four inches off the bank.

A tremendous vibration shook Warren's rod as the great fish, crashing upwards through the calm surface of the dark pool, snapped its

jaws on the fly. As Warren set the hook, another powerful tremor vibrated up the leader and line and through the rod. The trout, temporarily shocked out of response, hovered in full view for a second. Then it exploded in a wild run downstream for the rapids. Warren's reel screamed as the line unwound to the backing. For a few precious terrible seconds all he was aware of was the throbbing of the rod and the line going, going, going. Then he stripped it out ahead of the fish's rush, and the trout, sensing a sudden release of tension, turned.

Quickly, Warren re-established tension. He glided down the bank into the water and set himself for shorter rushes, jumping, and fierce tugging as the fish sought the cover of banks, boulders, and logs. But the river here was smooth-bottomed and free of debris. The odds swung toward the fisherman.

The trout surged upstream, paused, and turned downstream again. As it neared the rapids, Warren exerted all the pressure he dared. The leader strained to breaking point. The fish fought doggedly at the hook. Surging up the line and rod came one great thump after another, the powerful lifebeats of the great trout. Warren could not see the fish. But his line and rod united him mysteriously and intimately to that quivering mass of chordate life.

Suddenly, the trout turned and rushed directly at Warren. The line went slack; he panicked. Then he dropped the net into the water. The trout turned aside, boiled upstream, and came out of the water twisting and turning to shake loose the fly. Warren gathered the line in his left hand and rediscovered tension. The trout had not thrown the hook.

Now it threw its great weight into a battle for bankside. But it was too far out in the stream, and it expended too much effort as Warren grudgingly yielded line. Eventually, it gave up the surge. The contest became a series of short rushes and thumps by the fish, the fisherman neutralizing each. The fish was tiring. Warren, ever wary of another sudden fierce rush which could snap the leader, possibly frayed by the trout's rough mouth, kept the arc in the rod and slowly brought in the line. Subconsciously, he savored the salt in the perspiration pouring off his forehead, flowing around his eyes and down his cheeks to the corners of his mouth. Gradually, he drew the fish into sight beneath the smooth surface of the water. It was huge, vibrant, unreal. Warren felt unspeakable cruelty as he destroyed the fish, moment by moment. The pounding of his own heart increased as the strength of the trout ebbed.

Each time he drew the fish nearer, it moved back and forth and pulled away. Sensing its own destruction, it struggled beyond fatigue to stay free of the net and the hard white hands which held it. But the tempo of the struggle was in control of the fisherman now. Foot by foot he drew the great tiring trout toward him. He waited for the side roll which would tell him of complete fatigue and no further power or will to resist. Minutes later it came.

Warren slid the net out in front of him and dropped it below the fish. Working quickly to prevent the great trout, held taut on a short line, from

breaking free of its own weight, he slipped the net under it and captured it. Drawing the weight to him, he prepared to slip his fingers into a locking grip through the gills. Victory and vindication were his. But he hesitated, studying the fly held loosely in the torn cartilage of the great trout's mouth. It was the only evidence of this vibrant creature's magnificent instinctive struggle for survival, a struggle it had lost. Almost. Warren slipped the fly out and righted the fish in the water. It lacked strength to hold itself against the current. He supported it gently, feeling energy slowly stream back into the muscles of its tail fin. A moment later it flicked the fin slightly, slowly drifted to the bottom of the river, and glided out of sight into the murky depths of the dark pool.

For several moments Warren stood by the bank of Heron Creek peering hypnotically into the dark haven of the great trout. Then, as the nervous shock of his battle with the fish wore off, he became aware of cold drying sweat all down his back, of a limpness in his legs, of the river running softly by. He sat down and dangled his legs in the quiet waters of the dark pool.

Minutes later, he clipped the fly from the leader, reeled in all the line, and broke down his rod. From the lower section he disengaged the reel, putting it into his vest pocket. Carrying the two sections of rod in his left hand, he turned and started slowly back down the trail along Heron Creek. He was humming softly to himself.

The Crooked Tree

• John Lowry

My brother cared little for the outdoors, ignoring the summer pond and fleeing snow like a bird out of season. Football was downright foolishness. He was odd, I used to think, sitting in his arm chair, peering through thick spectacles at an immense book upon his lap. I imagined him joining a club, sniffing cognac, and pronouncing the world a bad place. In reality, he sat in the living room of our little home, next to the window, nursing the illnesses which fell upon him with the regularity of the seasons.

It was not his fault, my mother told me; like our father, dead ten years, he had been endowed with a weak constitution. I mustn't take advantage; I mustn't tease. No doubt, it was all true, yet I persisted in my belief that Robert was odd. He took pleasure in nightmares, studying the cruelty of life as some men did the habits of bees. Nothing escaped him; a sudden death, an accident, a dramatic turn of fortune caused him to grow excited. A plane had crashed in the mountains, he said one day, not a moment after another had passed without an inkling of danger. Wasn't it strange?

"Why do you think one should crash, instead of the other?" he asked.

"Luck," I replied with sturdy common sense.

A glimmer came into his eye which made me uneasy.

"Is that it?" he said, walking off

like a man of forty. I complained about his oddness to my mother, but she bid me hush. He didn't mean anything by it, she whispered. He was not well, and one mustn't pay attention to what he said. And, casting me an entreating look which I knew well, she added that he was very much like his father.

Robert felt better from time to time and expressed interest in the outdoors. My mother became as jolly as he did on our holidays and bundled him up as though he were being sent off to Canada instead of our back yard. He even agreed to toss the football, as though he had never thought it absurd. But he was no sooner outside than he was cold, or afflicted with a cramp in his leg; in summer, a chill swept over him and he burst into a sweat, which was inevitably followed by a fever and the doctor. On one occasion, he almost died, and I remember the loud ticking of the grandfather clock as I sat in our living room, the doctor's coat over my arm.

"What causes it, Tom?" he asked me one evening. He was recovering from a virus and sat in his armchair, a blanket about his legs, his face gleaming with perspiration.

"Causes what?" I replied, turning a page of my magazine. He made no answer. I looked up to find him staring peculiarly.

"Want a piece of chocolate?" I said uneasily. He shook his head.

"What causes it, Tom?" he repeated.

I decided he was out of his head. I made no reply and ran to my mother, telling her what he had said and how he had stared so oddly. She was putting away the dishes, and when a cup slipped from her hand and smashed on the floor, she burst into tears.

He was odd, damned odd, and I let it go at that. In the fall, I made varsity football at Munroe High School, and fell in love with the girl who lived on the corner of our street. I was a small boy, and threw myself into scrimmage like a mortar shell let loose in a trench. I bloodied a number of noses and, one day, had mine broken in turn. Our coach approved of me, for he'd rather have a boy with fight than talent. The doctor assured me I had enough nose for further encounters, put plaster over it, and sent me home with an injunction that I shouldn't fight along the way. The pain was maddening, but I made light of it when I met Agnes Connally. She thought I looked gruesome and begged me to stop when I began telling her of the boy who had fractured his spine last season. We walked on in silence, stopping beneath the elm tree near her home. The sky was dark and beautiful through its limbs, and we saw a star, then two, then a dozen.

"Poor nose," she said, brushing her lips lightly over it.

I kissed her boldly on the mouth. I cried that I loved her, but she broke away with a laugh and was swallowed up in her doorway. She waved from a window, then disappeared.

No matter. My mother was dozing when I got home, and I crept past her up to my room, where Robert

sat at his desk blinking over a book. I threw myself on the bed and, after a fit of idiotic laughter, told him that I had kissed Agnes Connally, that we were in love and as good as married. Robert paid no attention, though a page rattled in his hand. I undressed, tossing my clothes on the floor, and told him about my nose, what Coach Keane had said and how, it was rumored, a scout from a Big Ten college had been in the stands last week. It would not surprise me, I said, if he had noticed me; I had heart, and that's what it took. I got into bed and smoothed down the covers. Could he imagine it, his brother, Tom Sloane, a Big Ten player? Why, I might turn professional someday, marry Agnes, and end up a coach, still a young man, of course. Robert got up, turned off the light, and undressed.

"I'm going to write a story," he said when he had gotten into bed.

I laughed raucously.

He was silent; then, after a while, he told me it was to be called "The Crooked Tree." I was already sleepy and wished to be alone with my dreams of Agnes. He had picked a poor time to be odd.

"Do you want to hear it?" he asked.

I grumbled that it was late.

"It will just take a minute."

I groaned and rolled over on my side to listen. Robert raised himself on an elbow, hesitated, then began. It was a silly story, indeed. It seemed that a man loved trees very much; the grounds about his home were full of them, all kinds, and he cared for them as though they were children. But they had all been planted long ago, and he wanted to raise one with his own hands and watch it grow. So one day he picked a fine sapling

and planted it, imagining that it would last forever and that his grandchildren would swing from its limbs. The tree sprouted and grew, but it was a very ugly, crooked tree and before long it died, standing black and hideous amid the other trees. Then the man had all the trees cut down except the crooked one, and moved away.

"Do you like it, Tom?" he asked brightly.

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

My nose had begun to ache again, yet sleep swept around the back of my head, and I saw Robert's story in the darkness, a black rope dangling from a tall cliff.

"No, it's stupid," I replied, tugging at the rope so that the cliff fell, tumbling me end over end in darkness.

Within a month, Robert developed a clot in his leg and, late one afternoon, he died. My mother was about to bring him a dish of pudding, and I remember it sat in the kitchen until very late that night. It was monstrous, but I dared not touch it. For a long while, I had an uneasy conscience and wished I had remarked kindly upon his story. Yet, it was silly, I thought, and Robert had been odd, sickly. In time, I forgot about him.

I began to live for football, especially since Agnes had started coming to the games; we had an agreement that if I made a fine pay, we would look at one another immediately, achieving, I imagined, a consecration of sorts. It was not long before I discovered that our quarterback, Jeep Hanlon, paid homage to the same god, turning solemnly towards the stands when he had distinguished himself; and when Agnes appeared at practice, we circled her

like hawks, fighting desperately to inflict mortal wounds with the claws of wit. One day, Jeep asked if she were tired of me yet, and was parried with a smile; in turn, I won a promise that she would attend the best game of the year. It seemed as though the tide had turned, and that night I laughed so merrily at the frost upon the window that my mother took the precaution of locking up the wine.

The best game turned out to be dismal indeed. Winter had relented the day before, so that the breeze which swept onto the field from across the lake was as bitter as a baby's yawn. The sky, blocked with clouds since Thanksgiving, had turned a creamy pink at sunset, and rumors flew that the ice in Mill brook had suddenly darkened, so that small boys put their heads to the sides of trees and claimed to hear the sap running. One stretched, heard the splash of trout in blue waters, and had his dreams disturbed by the sound of tossing willows. When the whistle blew, both teams charged with the ferocity of spring lambs; a back slid through the mud, and Jeep Hanlon, setting himself for his first pass, saw the ball squirt from his hand like a bar of soap in the shower. Both sides fumbled and played like ghosts in search of memories. We were silent at half time when Coach Keane asked if we would like hammocks brought to the field. It was useless. The second half was worse, and the crowd became so still that one dared not lift his eyes lest he discover rank desertion. In the final minutes I ran carelessly in the backfield, dogged by a guard who smiled as though mortally wounded. Jeep had not completed a pass, had been hunted all afternoon like a fox

in front of the hounds. With a minute left, he spied me and threw in a chopping motion, so that the ball flew not six feet above the ground. I broke off exchanging insults with the wounded guard, dodged to my right, and caught the ball. Then I wheeled, pumping my legs furiously, for the ground slid beneath me like a treadmill, and shot off towards the goal. The crowd let out a pained shout, as though a man had been poleaxed to the ground, and I crossed the goal line accompanied by the sound of the final gun. I turned and saw Jeep throw his helmet into the air, bounding towards me like a kangaroo; behind him, shaking his head as though struggling with a dream, was Coach Keane. All was madness.

That evening, my mother treated me to cake and brandy. I told her again how Coach Keane had embraced me, called me his runt, and named a great future, and how Jeep, sitting in front of his locker, had inspected his hands, as though fearing to find them cracked. His father stood over him; how many passes had he completed? Jeep held up one finger, and Mr. Hanlon swore viciously.

"It was a hell of a pass, Mr. Hanlon," I said, blushing with generosity.

"Crap," he replied, a glitter in his eyes, "you were lucky, kid."

My mother lowered her fork.

"But, Tom, you won the game, didn't you?"

I said I had, but something came to mind which destroyed my appetite for cake and brandy. I left the table and went morosely to the window next to Robert's chair. For I had met Agnes Connally outside the dressing room and, overcome with elation,

had rushed up to her. I would have kissed her, but she fought loose.

"But I won the game!" I cried, astonished.

"Did you?" she replied and, rubbing her arm, turned her back upon me. Half an hour later, hidden behind a tree, I saw her leave with Jeep and laid a dim curse on both their heads.

Things went badly after that. I would have been wise if I had scooped up the afternoon, put it in a box, and had it delivered to me a year hence. When the season ended and I had had my nose broken a second time, Coach Keane called me to his office. He was studying weight and height charts at his desk, while the assistant coach, a dark, muscular man who lifted weights in the school basement each dawn, sat nearby, tapping a pair of worn cleats together.

"You know," Keane said, his eyelids fluttering as he fixed me sharply, "you're too small. You gotta grow." The assistant coach shot me a suspicious look and began to wring the cleats as though he had laundered them.

I smiled, thought better of it, and shrugged.

"So, I'll grow."

"Yeah?"

I told him to give me something difficult to do, and with a noncommittal sniff he waved me out of his office. The assistant coach watched me leave, biting thoughtfully at one of the cleats.

I took no chances and that summer found a job in a lumber camp, felling trees with the insouciance of a house wrecker, sleeping soundly at night, consoled by the dull ache in my back and limbs which my mother recognized as growing pains. I chinned myself on the rafters over

my bed each morning and ignored the sunset to do sit-ups on a mattress of crumbling leaves. I slept while others drank, and refused a cigarette with the smug comment that it surely inhibited the growth of the chest cavity. I returned home two days before the start of summer practice and, stretching myself against the line penciled on the kitchen wall, found that I had grown half an inch.

Yet, at practice no one seemed taller, and instead of becoming enraged by my half inch of progress, Coach Keane sat on the bench absorbed by the tip of his shoe. But the scrubs had more fight and, more than once, a boy I had upended like a wicker basket last December stood his ground, causing me to churn against him like a ship struggling on a reef. It meant nothing, I assured myself; the hungry always ran faster than the proud. I fumbled twice in succession, and before I could catch my breath, Keane broke from the bench shouting like an enraged terrier.

"I saw you, you flinched," he screamed, pointing me out as though I had snatched a purse. I denied it, and he called for a pass, arcing around the descending ball as though it were a bomb.

"You don't like getting hit," he barked.

"It's a lie. I never flinched in my life!"

"Flinching," Keane repeated and, with a calm smile, ordered me to the bench. I obeyed, sitting next the assistant coach, who was taking notes on a crumpled piece of paper. He chewed gum as though suffering from a violent chill.

"Flinching," he said loudly, making a note on his scrap of paper.

I quit the team after I had sat on

the bench for a week. Keane was pulling on a jersey when I told him, and he stopped to listen, his face hidden behind the cloth, his arms extended over his head. When I finished, he ran a comb through his hair, jerked my hand, and hurried off. I went to my locker. Someone had borrowed three pairs of clean socks, and I kicked at the door until it was scarred silver. But my mother found consolation. I had always been bright, she said, and my teachers explained my mediocrity in terms of football and the inability of man to serve two masters. Now was my chance to free the scholar; I pounced upon it as a man does a ladder extended to a burning building. Each night, I hurried to my room, arranged my desk, threw open the books, and sat for hours tapping a pencil on a blank sheet of paper. Within a week, I had decided to join the swimming team, but the coach pronounced me muscle-bound across the chest; I swam, he said, like a tug pulling a scow laden with junk. Yet, my grades rose, giving me the uneasy feeling that I suffered from a fever, while my mother smiled like a weary guard hearing the cock crow. However, slowly, certainly, my little ship went dead in the water; it was not long before my teachers abandoned me as hopeless. I no longer tapped my pencil upon a pad of paper, but lay on my bed in the darkness, pondering the mysteries attendant upon three inches of growth.

My mother suggested a job to fill my idle afternoons. I made no objection and sought out Mr. Wagner, the town's quality butcher, who needed a level-headed boy to deliver superior meat and take care of the bicycle entrusted to him. No girls, Mr. Wagner said, leering and ad-

justing his straw hat to a more rakish angle, understand? The last boy had bothered with girls and allowed his bicycle to be stolen. I swore to no interest in women and, next evening, rapped on the kitchen door of the Hanlon residence, a bag of hamburger turning damp in my hand. I was bidden enter and found Mr. Hanlon stirring a pitcher of martinis, his face drawn up in something like detachment.

"Hey, aren't you what's his name?" he asked when I thrust the soggy bag at him. I said I was, and the stirrer went dead in the pitcher.

"That right? You heard about Jeep?" I shook my head; he had won a football scholarship to Michigan State University.

"Yeah," he said, the stirrer seeming to activate itself, "you sure got him sore that day he threw so bad. Remember? That was good for him, real good."

I said I must be going, that someone might try to tamper with Mr. Wagner's bicycle. He followed me to the door, cradling the pitcher, telling me what a good little player I used to be.

"Sure you won't have a drink?" he asked as I hopped on my bike. I waved and shot off in the darkness. Perhaps the hamburger would turn to horsemeat.

I expected to find some cheer at home, but my mother was waiting, holding a piece of paper and looking as though I had been summoned to an execution. I wasn't to graduate after all, she said faintly; instead, I had been given a chance to repair my mathematics over the summer. I took a deep breath and, after observing that September was as good as June, told her about Jeep Han-

lon. It was as though a beam had slipped, bringing the roof down on our heads, for my mother broke into tears and began invoking the memory of Robert, who surely would have done better by her. I didn't hear any more. It was Sports Night at the high school, and the promise of last year's football films rose like a cool breeze on an August night.

I had not attended Sports Night since freshman year, but it never changed. The old grads filled the first two rows, turning slow, suspicious glances on the young men who broke their records twice a day in practice. Inevitably, one of them would be found drunk in a telephone booth; another, asleep, his arm thrown nostalgically over the desk that had been his thirty years before. Lunch would be rewarmed in the cafeteria and served on paper plates decorated with a blue American eagle; still later would be beer, songs, and not a dry eye in the place. Jeep and his father sat on the far side of the hall. Mr. Hanlon was tense, as though Jeep's scholarship dangled from the ceiling by a thread, while his son read a program and scratched lazily at his groin. We heard speeches by the old athletes, exhorting the young to scale the same heights; letters were awarded, and when a blue smoke began to rise like haze from a peat bog, the light dimmed, and we saw the winking films of bygone years.

There was an abrupt hush as hollow-eyed young men in baggy shorts breasted a tape, quaking like tin lizzies; a low moan rose from the audience and then the first spatter of applause, which spread through the room like the onrush of summer rain. The old grads raised themselves in

response, one by one throwing grotesque shadows across the screen which flickered like the tape of memory. It went on until the film broke, as it did every year. A moment of stunned silence and then the single loud boo which wore a tail of hearty laughter.

The football films were in garish color. I caught myself leaning forward, my hands clenched. But I might have saved myself the trouble, for the films had been spliced in favor of Jeep Hanlon, late of Michigan State. He seemed to play by himself; no sooner did he pass than he appeared to catch the ball and run it across the goal line like a berserk locomotive. Opposing players clutched at him with the despair of lepers appealing to a prophet. For a moment, I saw myself receive the pass of a year before, wheel, and extend a hand, as though warding off the magic which faded me from the screen in favor of Jeep Hanlon, who threw pass after pass, satisfying some obscure Faustian urge. I glanced across at Jeep

and his father. Both were applauding shamelessly.

I ran home, not, as in the past, carrying the ball tucked against my chest, pushing tackles aside as though they were beaded curtains, but fearfully, breathlessly, knowing that I was pursued. I wove through dark alleys, seeing by the light of memory, hoping to hear the crash of the dim shape behind me. But he persisted, and when I whirled, imagining him trapped beneath a cone of light, he became the darker shadow within a shadow. I barred our home against him, dashed up the stairs, and shut the door of my room. I stood a moment, half expecting to hear a clamor below. But all was silence, and I lay on the bed plying the covers, reassured by the familiar banging of a loose shutter. It wasn't long before my pursuer came forward in the darkness.

"Robert," I whispered, "is that you?"

It was and I sat up, trembling.

"Oh, Robert," I cried, "it was true, it was true!"

A New Aesthetic

• D. L. Emblen

"As fair as dollars," Benson says of full
 And plenty orchards ripe with apples, sweet
 With cider-strengthened estimates of yield
 In barrels, demijohns, and pints:
 Abundance overflowing all containers—
 Richly rotting, insect-luring heaps
 Of dividends delight the profit-counting
 Eye, perfume the thin, penurious nose,
 Make glad the passing holder of mortgages—
 For beauty varies with the viewer's eye.
 As Benson says, "as fair as dollars,"
 Apples, plump and interest-bearing, be.

Contributors

GWEN GRATION, a prolific writer before she met her untimely death, was a Canadian who spent her childhood in England, Canada, and the United States. On her death she left a number of unpublished manuscripts, one of which is the story here published. JOSEPH BEATTY, on the staff of La Salle College, had three poems in the January 1967 issue of this magazine. JESSE STUART says that he wrote his story in Athens, Greece, last summer but didn't get the story there. His *A Jesse Stuart Reader*, in paperback, shows, according to *The New York Times*, "the unique Stuart blending of vitality, humor, and humanity." THOMAS KRETZ, a Jesuit Brother, lives in Wernersville, Pennsylvania. PAUL FRIEDMAN, who lives in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, is a writer of fiction. GORDON GILSDORF has appeared several times in the recent issues of **four quarters**. DIANNE SISCO is editor of *Graffito*, an independently published little magazine. DONALD C. STEWART, assistant professor of English at the University of Illinois, had his first story, "Gustave Berger," in *The Kansas Magazine*, 1967. JOHN LOWRY teaches at Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, and has had stories published in *Plume and Sword* and *The Georgia Review*; he writes that **four quarters** "gave me my first encouragement when I began writing seriously" some years ago. D. L. EMBLEN, of Santa Rosa, California, has appeared in this magazine before.

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